

The 2023 War with Hamas: What You Need to Know

On 7 October 2023, the Jewish holy day of *Simchat Torah*, Hamas launched a massive terror attack on Israel, firing thousands of rockets from Gaza into Israel, while 2,000 Hamas militiamen broke through the Gaza border fence and laid siege to 25 Israeli communities and an outdoor music festival. In the ensuing carnage, more than 1,000 innocent men, women and children were murdered in cold blood, scores more were wounded, and 150-200 others were taken hostage to Gaza. Dozens of foreign nationals from over 40 countries were among those who fell prey to the Hamas onslaught. This brutal pogrom was the single worst day of murder and mayhem against the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Hezbollah in Lebanon is now threatening to open a new front on Israel's northern border.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is Hamas?

Hamas is a radical Sunni Islamist terrorist organization which has been the *de facto* ruler of the Gaza Strip since 2007. Considered the Palestinian chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas was founded in late 1987 as a political rival to the Fatah-led PLO, and its charter commits the group to the destruction of Israel and creating an Islamic state under *sharia* law in Palestine. The Hamas charter promotes a dark Islamic eschatology that calls for perpetual *jihad* (holy war) against the Jewish state and people as a first step to regaining Jerusalem and then taking on the "Crusader West" to secure world domination for Islam. Hamas has its main presence in Gaza and broad support in the West Bank, but its senior leadership has been harbored in Qatar for the past decade.

After Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in the 2005 Disengagement, Hamas liquidated the local Fatah leaders and security forces in a bloody coup in 2007. Today, it governs over 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza, imposing a strict brand of fundamentalist Islam. Hamas totally rejects any peace negotiations or agreements with Israel, including the Oslo Accords, as well as a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although Hamas presents itself as a Muslim welfare society, the group commits most of its budget to its military buildup, including rockets, weapons and terror tunnels. The militia group is also known for its many suicide bombings and other terror attacks inside Israel. Watch this video to learn more: [Understanding Hamas](#)

Who is Hezbollah?

Hezbollah is a Shi'ite terror militia based in Lebanon and backed by Iran and Syria which has been committed to the destruction of Israel since its founding in 1982. Calling Israel a "cancerous tumor," Hezbollah leader sheikh Hassan Nasrallah once claimed that Allah has regathered the Jewish people from around the world into one place to make it easier to destroy them. The clerical Shi'ite regime in Iran funds Hezbollah with over \$700 million per year.

Hezbollah's original manifesto from 1985 called for establishing an Islamic Republic in Lebanon, while adding, "Our struggle will end only when this entity [the state of Israel] is obliterated." Today, Hezbollah has managed to build a large army of nearly 100,000 militiamen and accumulated over 250,000 missiles and rockets now capable of reaching all of Israel. Its military capabilities have allowed Hezbollah to gain a stranglehold over the Lebanese government. Many countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Arab League, and Israel, have declared Hezbollah to be a global terrorist organization, while the European Union designates only its military wing as a terrorist entity. Learn more about Hezbollah in this video: [Terrorists? Or Freedom Fighters?](#)

What is jihad?

The *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* defines *jihad* as a fight, battle or holy war against infidels, which many Islamic teachers insist is a religious duty of all Muslims until the entire world comes under the rule of Islam. On Friday, October 13, 2023, one week after the brutal Hamas massacre of Israelis on Simchat Torah, Hamas called for a "global day of jihad" to demonstrate solidarity with Palestine, Jerusalem, and Al-Aqsa (the Temple Mount), to include attacks and "lynchings" on Jews and their supporters worldwide. Some Muslim scholars have sought to define jihad as an inner struggle against sinful behavior, however it has been widely understood for centuries to also mean waging holy war on non-Muslims.

What is International Humanitarian Law (IHL)?

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is a set of rules that seeks, for humanitarian reasons, "to limit the effects of armed conflict."¹ Also called "the law of warfare" or "the law of armed conflict," IHL dictates the rules combatants should follow—with a central tenet to not target civilians. IHL includes the [1949 Geneva Conventions](#) and [1977 protocols](#). All parties fighting in a conflict are obliged to respect IHL.²

What is International Criminal Law (ICL)?

[International Criminal Law](#) (ICL) falls within the jurisdiction of the [International Criminal Court](#) (ICC) in The Hague. The ICC has jurisdiction over individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and, to a limited extent, the crime of aggression (waging an illegal war). Israel has joined the United States, Russia and many other states in not yet becoming a signatory to the treaty creating the ICC, while "Palestine" was allowed to join in 2015.³ The ICC describes war crimes as "grave breaches of the Geneva conventions" as well as "other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict." This encompasses breaches of international humanitarian law.⁴

What is the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)?

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is the State of Israel's primary military corps. Notice it is called the "Defense" forces. The IDF's activities are subject to the authority of Israel's democratically-

¹ <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/ihl-rules-of-war-FAQ-Geneva-Conventions>

² Ibid.

³ <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/general-principles-international-criminal-law-factsheet>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2023/oct/12/what-are-the-rules-of-war-and-how-do-they-apply-to-the-israel-gaza-conflict>

elected civil government. The IDF's purpose is to preserve the State of Israel, protect its independence, and foil attempts by its enemies to disrupt normal life within it.⁵

Who started the war?

Hamas started the war against Israel with the worst massacre of innocent civilians in modern Israel's history, according to Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesman Daniel Hagari. Israel declared war on Hamas after Hamas as well as Islamic Jihad militiamen broke International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Criminal Law (ICL) by firing thousands of rockets toward Israel on the morning of October 7, 2023, before breaching the heavily fortified border fence with Israel. They then sent some 2,000 heavily-armed militiamen deep into Israeli territory by foot, paragliders, and vehicles, where they massacred and wounded thousands of people—innocent men, women, children, babies, and the elderly, as well as many police officers and soldiers. The list of heinous war crimes including raping women, beheading children, burning entire families alive in their homes, and taking some 150-200 people as hostages back into Gaza. Israeli forces entered the infiltrated areas on Israel's side of the border to rescue civilians and fight off the terrorists. The IDF then began launching airstrikes in Gaza.

What did Hamas hope to accomplish with the events of October 7?

A senior Hamas official based in Lebanon said the October 7 attack was in response to “Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people in Jerusalem and the West Bank” and to “break the blockade on the Gaza Strip.” They also labelled the mass terror operation the “Al-Aqsa Storm” launched in defense of the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, which was in no danger from Israel at the time.

Does Israel have the legal right to respond?

Yes. The acts against Israeli citizens on October 7 make Hamas and Islamic Jihad criminally liable for war crimes. Multiple acts violated the “rule of distinction” in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which requires combatants to limit attacks to legitimate military targets.⁶ According to IHL, below are “inexcusable and flagrant violations of humanitarian norms and international law and odious insults to humanity that constitute war crimes”:

- The willful, deliberate, and hysteric massacre of civilians, including young people attending an open-air music event and the indiscriminate entry into, destruction, and pillaging of private civilian homes in Israel's towns and villages, and indiscriminate murder of civilians living in those homes
- The taking of multiple civilian hostages, including entire families, elderly, women, and infants, and their cruel and violent kidnapping and transfer to the Gaza Strip
- The horrific exhibition of dead and mutilated bodies in the streets of Gaza
- The deliberate and cynical use by Hamas and Islamic Jihad of their own civilian population in Gaza as human shields, as well as their use of Gaza's many mosques, hospitals, schools, and private houses as weapons storage facilities and firing platforms⁷
- The creation and use of tactical tunnels beneath urban civilian areas, hospitals, public facilities, and urban roads⁸

⁵ <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/spirit-of-the-idf/>

⁶ <https://jcpa.org/hamas-and-islamic-jihad-are-criminally-liable-for-war-crimes/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA) says that advocating a religious holy war aimed at “creating a regional Islamic entity encompassing the whole of the territory of Israel contravenes the provisions of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention of Genocide.”⁹

Is Israel permitted to cut off the electricity to the Gaza Strip?

Israel agreed to provide electricity to the Gaza Strip as part of the [Oslo Accords](#) in 1993.¹⁰ However, no provision in IHL (International Humanitarian Law) *requires* Israel to provide free electricity to the Gaza Strip. Electricity enables Hamas to operate military command centers and charge batteries for lethal UAVs and drones used to attack Israeli citizens, hence the reason for cutting off its feed into Gaza’s power grid. Gaza does have its own electrical power plant but it needs fuel to run, and Israel has blocked its regular fuel shipments into Gaza as well, which means the power plant will soon shut down. The massacre and kidnapping of hundreds of Israeli citizens breaches the Oslo Accords. The Hamas authorities and terrorists in Gaza deny Israel’s right to exist, invade Israel, and massacre Israelis, and this releases Israel from responsibility to its commitments under Oslo Accords to supply power. Limiting the flow of electricity into Gaza from Israel will impair the enemy’s military capabilities, while continuing to provide electricity would enhance Hamas’ ability to strike Israel and murder more Israelis.

Are Gazan children’s deaths that result from Israel’s retaliation considered war crimes?

According to the IHL incidental death of a child during legitimate fighting does not constitute a crime of any nature. The assumption that every death of a Palestinian child is tantamount to a war crime ignores the documented history of the Palestinian terrorist groups in Gaza intentionally using Palestinian children as human shields. It also is important to note here that many are joining Hamas in trying to deflect blame for its flagrant war crimes onto Israel. One blatant example is the Hamas claim that Israel is endangering the civilian population of Gaza, whereas Israel is urging them to move to safety while Hamas is forcing them to stay, to be used as human shields. Hamas also accuses Israel of deliberately targeting women and children, whereas even official Palestinian figures clearly indicate Israeli forces are meticulously seeking to avoid harm to women and children even as Hamas intentionally shells Israeli towns and cities, and its militiamen have just murdered hundreds of women, children and the elderly at point-blank range.

Is Israel working on rescuing the hostage?

Yes. However, how Israel’s leaders will do this is unclear.

How many hostages are currently in Gaza?

As of October 15, it is estimated there are 150-200 hostages still being held captive in Gaza. These include men, women, children, babies, the elderly and soldiers, including foreign nationals from the US and some 30 other countries.

What countries are currently helping Israel?

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Appendix I, of Annex III of the Israel-Palestinian Interim Agreement

The United States has committed its full support to Israel and has sent the USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier to the eastern Mediterranean to assist Israel if needed. The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier is en route to the Mediterranean as well. The United States has said it plans to provide military aid to Israel and help with hostage-release efforts. Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy also issued a joint statement pledging “to ensure Israel is able to defend itself.”

How can I support Israel relief efforts?

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem is a respected charitable organization that has been based in Jerusalem for over 40 years, providing comfort and humanitarian aid to the Israeli people. Your funds help all Israeli citizens with such things as: evacuations, food and basic necessities, safety equipment for first-responders, local security services and others in uniform, trauma-related needs, ambulances in the north and south, renovating underground and communal bomb shelters across the country, helping families rebuild their homes, and providing helmets and bullet-proof vests to civilians.

How can I pray?

Join the ICEJ Global Prayer Call

The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem is hosting its Global Prayer Gathering DAILY at 4PM (Israel time) until further notice. We are committed to stand with Israel in prayer. We would love for you to join us for timely updates, prayer, and worship. Join at: on.icej.org/ICEJGlobalPrayer